

HOWKINS & HARRISON

PLANNING, DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

FOR A

DOG WALKING AREA

AT

ELM TREE FARM
WENDLEBURY
BICESTER
OXFORDSHIRE
OX25 2QA

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1 Introduction

This document has been produced by James Hatherell of Howkins & Harrison LLP, on behalf of Mr J and Mrs K Shouler of Elm Tree Farm, Wendlebury, Bicester, Oxfordshire, OX25 2QA.

It is written in support of a full planning application for the change of use of an agricultural field for use as a dog walking area, with a secure parking area, and an ancillary overflow waiting area.

The purpose of this document is to show that the proposal is a suitable development on the site and will do this by explaining the design of the proposed development, access to the site, and the relevant Planning Policy in support of the application.

2 Background

Mr and Mrs Shouler run a farming business at Elm Tree Farm which extends to approximately 350 acres. The farming enterprise comprises a mixture of livestock and arable land.

Farming has been presented with numerous challenges recently. World economic difficulties have resulted in a substantial increase to the costs of farming inputs and overheads, and the recent loss of farming subsidies have compounded the difficulties. Due to issues with profitability, many farms are looking to diversify their income streams, and Mr and Mrs Shouler are no exception. They have found an opportunity to use a currently unused block of land for a commercially sensible business opportunity that would benefit them and the wider community. Mr and Mrs Shouler are familiar with farm diversification having converted a disused farm building under Class R permitted development rights in the recent past.

The proposed dog walking site is located at Elm Tree Farm in a field that extends to approximately 1.87 ha. Recent infrastructure works in the area have resulted in a new road and farm track which have bisected a larger arable field extending to over 5.5 ha. The split has left a field that it is no longer economically viable to cultivate with arable crops due to its limited size.

Mr and Mrs Shouler would like to utilise the recently split field to diversify the income stream and supplement their farm income, whilst providing useful amenity space in a tranquil, rural location.

There have been no previous planning applications for development on the application site.

3 Design

3.1 Site & Scale

Please refer to the Block Plan, submitted in support of this application, which details the layout of the site. For reference, the Block Plan is given below:



The dog walking area itself is 1.49 ha in size, with an additional 0.03 ha being taken up by the secure parking area and overflow car waiting area.

The site is not within a flood zone, conservation area, SSSI, AONB, or the Green Belt, and there is no Article 4 Direction over the land.

3.2 Use

It is proposed that part of the field parcel be converted from agricultural use to use as a dog walking area, with a secure parking area at the east of the site, and an overflow car waiting area on the opposite side of the adjacent farm track.

It is intended that the site will be used for general dog-walking purposes, but it will be especially useful for those with young or reactive dogs who need a secure area without fear of the dog escaping, or of negative encounters. The site will ensure that dogs, who

would otherwise be walked elsewhere, are kept away from livestock which would benefit both the dog-walkers and local farmers. Furthermore, the site would support both professional dog walkers and dog trainers by providing a safe, enclosed environment.

Dog walking areas lend themselves to rural locations and it is considered that the proposal would constitute an appropriate use of the site. The site would help to reduce the pressure on the nearby urban dog walking areas of Bicester and the surrounding villages.

The secure parking area would allow dog walkers to enter the site in their vehicle, before letting the dogs run free without fear of escape.

A new hedge would be planted along the south-east edge of the dog walking area which would allow enrichment of the site's biodiversity and will help to reduce any surface water run-off from the land.

Access to the dog walking area will be controlled via an online booking system that will allow members of the public to book private access to the site in 1 hour slots. Space for 2 regular parking bays and a further disabled parking bay will be provided, although there will be a limit of 1 household admitted to the site per booking, with a maximum of 2 cars within the secure parking area at any time.

It is anticipated that access will be provided 7 days per week, but will be limited to the following hours:

- Summer: 6am – 10pm
- Winter: 7am – 8pm

Two fully enclosed dog waste bins along with compostable bags will be provided on site which will be emptied regularly by the applicants. Along with daily field inspections, this will minimise any adverse odours.

The proposed site is 200m from the nearest residential dwelling. Any sounds due to dogs or traffic movements would be minimal, especially given the screening provided by the expanse of mature hedging and trees that surrounds the field on the two sides nearest the village.

3.3 Access

The site entrance lies off a farm track that is used to access Elm Tree Farm from the north. The concrete farm track was constructed as part of infrastructure improvements and was approved by Highways in respect of speed limits, visibility, turning, and access.

There are limited traffic movements along the farm track which services Elm Tree Farm only. A layby exists at the north end of the track to allow vehicles to pass. The number of traffic movements will be increased slightly by this proposal, but the inclusion of the overflow car waiting area will ensure that the farm track is not blocked by these vehicles.

The road from which the farm track leads is a minor road that itself has limited traffic movements as it only services a small number of other properties.

The overflow car waiting area has been designed to accommodate four vehicles which it is anticipated will be more than adequate.

The secure car park has been designed to accommodate at least two vehicles. There is enough space to accommodate disabled drivers, with the site allowing them sufficient room to manoeuvre around their vehicle. All access points and surfaces will be suitable for wheelchairs.

3.4 Layout & Appearance

The site would constitute a minimal change to the use of the agricultural land, with only a small area being covered with hardcore to form the secure parking and overflow parking areas. A hardcore surface is sufficiently durable for access and parking, as well as being permeable, allowing water to soak through and prevent any issues with water run-off.

A 1.8m tall steel-mesh fence would be erected around the perimeter of the dog walking area. A fence of this height would contain all dogs within the field and prevent the possibility of escape.

Three steel-mesh gates would be installed on site. One to allow vehicular access to the secure parking area (approx. 4.6m wide); one to allow pedestrian access to the dog walking area (approx. 2.0m wide); and one to allow a tractor into the dog walking area for the purposes of mowing the grass (approx. 3.6m wide).

The following image shows an example of the style of the proposed fencing and gates:



Image showing style of mesh fencing and gates

The dog walking area would be surrounded by a wildflower margin which would act as a buffer between the dog walking area and the field hedging, as well as reducing surface water run-off. It would also act to minimise any visual stimuli between the dogs and activities on adjacent farmland.

A new hedge would be planted along the south-east edge of the dog walking area closest to the farm drive which would provide wildlife habitat and screening which would create a more secluded environment for the walkers and their dogs.

In addition, the improvements to the site, and the ongoing maintenance, would benefit the local area by creating local employment opportunities.

4 Planning Policy

The proposed development has support at both the national level through the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and at the local level through the Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 (Part 1) (CLP). This section lists the key policies in support of the development.

4.1 The NPPF

The NPPF encourages a prosperous rural economy, providing support for rural businesses, sustainable rural tourism, and the diversification of agricultural land.

Paragraph 84 supports rural businesses, land-based businesses, rural tourism, and the development of accessible spaces, stating:

"Planning policies and decisions should enable:

- b) [...] the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;*
- c) sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside; and*
- d) the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship."*

Paragraph 85 lends support to development in rural areas, despite their lack of public transport:

"Planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport. In these circumstances, it is important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by improving the scope for access on foot, cycling or public transport). The use of previously developed land, and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist."

Furthermore, Paragraph 92 lends support to accessible green infrastructure that encourages walking, as well as places that are safe, accessible, and promote social interaction.

Improved public access to the countryside is supported by Paragraph 120, and further support for access to open spaces is given in Paragraph 98.

4.2 The CLP

The CLP also lends supports to various businesses in rural areas.

Paragraph C.238 supports rural employment, farm diversification, and the maintenance of local communities, stating:

Our vision for our rural areas is that our villages should be "lived in" as well as "slept in". To achieve this, rural areas must seek to provide appropriate opportunities for new jobs such as support for farm diversification proposals and rural employment opportunities that are sustainable and support local communities [...].

Local rural employment and the visitor economy are supported by Paragraph C.237:

The key economic issues facing the villages and rural areas are:

- *[...] Ensuring that there are appropriate opportunities for local rural employment [...].*
- *The need to support the vibrant visitor economy in a way which contributes to the local economy whilst also preserving the local environment. [...]*

5 Conclusion

Mr and Mrs Shouler aim to create a safe, secure facility which positively benefits the local community whilst being sustainable and with minimal negative impact on the existing wildlife and environment.

The above sections have shown that the development is supported by planning policy at both the local and national levels, and that the development would complement the existing agricultural business and rural nature of the setting.

A dog walking area would provide a green, open space for local residents who would otherwise have to travel farther afield. In addition, the provision of disabled parking promotes inclusive access to the countryside to those for whom there may be limited opportunities elsewhere.

The proposal would allow the creation of an attractive rural business that would provide access to the countryside for dog walkers and professional dog trainers alike, whilst contributing to a vibrant local community and allowing Mr and Mrs Shouler to diversify their farming enterprise.

The addition of a dog walking area would constitute a low-impact development with minimal change to the land, and would benefit the local economy by promoting rural tourism and by providing a safe and accessible open space for members of the public.

Furthermore, a positive determination would help to cement the reputation of Oxfordshire as a county that welcomes rural businesses opportunities.

This document has demonstrated that changing the use of an agricultural field for use as a dog walking area would constitute an appropriate development on site, and that there is no compelling reason for the proposed development to be refused.